



# PHYSICIANS FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

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## **Physicians for Criminal Justice Reform calls for ending \$5 medical copay in Pennsylvania state prisons**

**MECHANICSBURG, PA** – Physicians for Criminal Justice Reform (PfcJR) [sent a letter today](#) to Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Acting Secretary George Little urging that the required \$5 copay for basic health care for incarcerated individuals be eliminated. PfcJR joins FAMM and the Pennsylvania Prison Society, who sent a [joint letter](#) back in March detailing why the fee creates an undue burden, in advancing this position.

“Physicians for Criminal Justice Reform believes that those incarcerated in Pennsylvania prisons should not be subjected to \$5 medical copays, which present a real barrier to medical care,” said Dr. Zane Kaleem, who is Assistant Director of the Correctional Health Care Task Force and Pennsylvania Liaison at PfcJR. “Being locked in prison away from your loved ones and society *is* the punishment for your crime - the suffering that results from blocking access to health care in Pennsylvania prisons should never have been part of it.”

Kaleem added, “The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections did the right thing when they suspended the copay during the height of the COVID pandemic, and they can do it again. PfcJR supports [Pennsylvania House Bill 1753](#), introduced by Rep. Amen Brown to permanently eliminate the \$5 copay in state prisons. We are also gratified that Senator Camera Bartolotta is taking further action on this issue with [forthcoming legislation](#) that will uphold the basic dignity that every human being deserves.”

Incarcerated individuals are the only group with a true right to health care under the U.S. Constitution, as established by [Estelle v. Gamble \(1976\)](#). Yet, they are effectively barred from

care in Pennsylvania via the \$5 medical copay requirement, which can take more than 26 hours of labor to pay off for somebody working a prison job at a minimum wage of 19 cents per hour. This carries damaging health consequences for people in prisons, who have a higher rate of chronic medical and psychiatric conditions which can quickly advance to severe and life-threatening complications when left untreated.

“FAMM appreciates the support of the Physicians for Criminal Justice Reform, who are using their expertise as medical professionals to advocate for getting rid of the \$5 medical copay in PA state prisons,” said FAMM Pennsylvania State Director Maria Goellner. “Copays force people in prison to delay seeking health care. Copays turn small, treatable medical problems into big, life-threatening, expensive ones. Easier access to health care is the key to better health care for people in prison and long-term savings for taxpayers.”

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[Physicians for Criminal Justice Reform \(PfCJR\)](#) was founded by a group of physicians who were struck by the myriad of ways that negative encounters with the criminal justice system lead to detrimental health consequences. We firmly believe that changing the interaction between the criminal justice system and individuals of targeted populations will ultimately lead to improved health of targeted communities. Follow us on [Twitter](#) and on [Facebook](#).